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ABSTRACT

This guide provides engagement specialists with information to help them build strong, lasting partnerships with employers and labor partners that translate into life-changing opportunities for the youth of California through the School-to-Career initiative (STC). (Companion guides for associations, labor unions and employers are available separately.) It begins by outlining these four easy steps to getting started in engaging workplace partners: be prepared, make a plan and stick to it, market and sell your service, and deliver flawless followup. The steps are then described in detail. Step 1 details understanding the market, organizing your product or service, and identifying your resources for engagement. Step 2 covers defining your customer base and qualifying the market, creating and following a marketing plan, focusing your efforts and connecting to others, and building a simple and efficient delivery system. Step 3 describes making the sale, beginning with a focus on customer service, and effectively structuring your sales presentation. Step 4 suggests activities needed to provide flawless followup from simple thank you notes to surveys that measure customer satisfaction. A section of additional resources provides websites to help answer questions and gain access to proven tools and strategies. (YLB)

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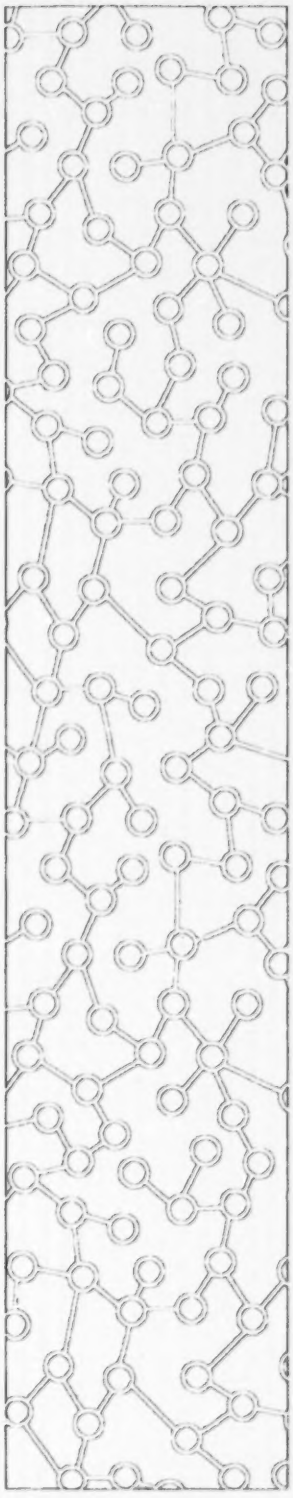
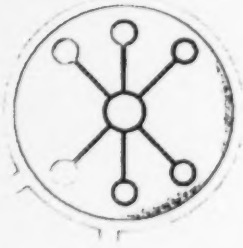
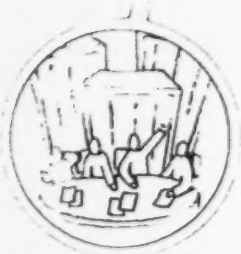


Get Connected to School-to-Career

A QUICK GUIDE for Engagement Specialists



Preparing Today's Students and Tomorrow's Workforce



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Getting Started—Four Easy Steps

Engaging workplace partners is a critical part of building a successful School-to-Career system and making real connections for youth. As an Engagement Specialist, you have many tools and people on your team and in your community to help make it happen. Below are four easy steps to the successful engagement of employers and labor:

STEP 1 — Be Prepared

Know the Market become familiar with local industry trends and forecasts, and identify those employers and labor organizations that are leading partners with school and youth programs.

Know Your Products and Services including the range of participation options that schools and the School-to-Career system can support, and the services you can provide to make participation easy.

Know Your Supply of Students and Schools in order to help target your efforts and effectively match new partners with appropriate students, teachers and school partners.

STEP 2 — Make a Plan and Stick to It!

Having a detailed plan that prioritizes and organizes your outreach activities is critical to delivering customer service that exceeds expectations and creates loyal employer and labor partners. Your marketing activities should include a steady balance among the following activity areas:

- **General Awareness** – media campaigns, events and newsletters.
- **Targeted Activities** – mailings, phone campaigns and prospecting.
- **Direct Recruiting** – presentations at meetings, in person and at job fairs or industry events.
- **Student and School Recruiting** – career days and outreach through coordinators, teachers and counselors.

STEP 3 — Market and Sell Your Service

- Network in multiple circles.
- Make contact with likely prospects and emphasize how School-to-Career can meet their needs.
- Leverage the work of others to create leads and be part of your team that solicits new employer and labor partners.

STEP 4 — Deliver Flawless Follow-up

- ✓ Send timely thank-you notes.
- ✓ Deliver on promises.
- ✓ Support the ongoing participation of your partners.
- ✓ Measure results and share information.
- ✓ Stay in continuous contact to ensure satisfaction and develop lasting relationships.

Making Real Connections

Congratulations! You are part of a movement to improve education and workforce development that is gaining momentum in California and recognizes that our schools can't do it alone. Through School-to-Career and your efforts as a workplace partner Engagement Specialist, increasing numbers of employer and labor partners are playing a critical role in preparing today's students and tomorrow's workforce.

As an Engagement Specialist, you have the primary responsibility for recruiting and connecting employer and labor partners to a range of School-to-Career activities, including work-based learning opportunities for students and teachers. This critical role is performed by individuals often referred to as "Career Specialists," "Business Liaisons," or "Work-Based Learning Coordinators." In some communities or partnerships, a program manager, counselor, educator, staff person or community volunteer performs this role part-time. In other cases, the local partnership or intermediary organization hosts a full-time position or small focused staff of Engagement Specialists.

Critical Success Factor

Your role as an Engagement Specialist is unique, and may differ significantly from others on your team who are focused on the classroom or supporting teachers. You have a different set of customers, and your approach should reflect what it takes to engage that audience. As you prepare to recruit workplace partners to School-to-Career, there are five critical factors to success to keep in mind.

- *Prioritize workplace partners as the primary customer for your services.*
- *Become sales and service oriented.*
- *Target resources to the engagement process.*
- *Apply proven tools and strategies.*
- *Focus on quality.*

This Quick Guide provides a helpful reference that corresponds with the other Quick Guides for Employers, Organized Labor and Associations, as well as additional tip sheets, guidebooks, sample plans and materials, assessments and workplans that can be found at www.nww.org and www.stc-clearinghouse.org. All are designed to help you build strong, lasting partnerships with employers and labor partners that translate into life-changing opportunities for the youth of California.

Content for this Quick Guide draws from numerous sources, including materials created by New Ways to Work, those collected from School-to-Career partnerships around the state, the Florida Recruitment & Orientation Guide and the Partnering With Employers Guide published by the California Community College Chancellor's Office Statewide Advisory Committee for Work-based Learning and Employment Services.

STEP 1 — Be Prepared

To be successful as an Engagement Specialist you should be well prepared before calling on a potential partner.

That means doing your homework on the local labor market, specifics about the industry and business of the potential partner, and any pressing needs or concerns a potential partner may have that you can solve. It also means that you have developed a professional approach to engagement that includes a process for making contacts and executing on promises made during a call or meeting. Successful engagement relies on professional tools and materials that make it easy for a workplace partner to become involved.

Understand the Market

Become familiar with the labor market by conducting ongoing research on trends, high-growth industries and specific businesses that may have unique workforce or image needs. There are several good sources for labor market information, including your local Employment Development Department office, One-Stop Career Center, Chamber of Commerce or simply the business section of your local newspaper. The more time you spend in the business and labor "world," the better prepared you will be to connect to these valuable partners.

Workplace partners can be convinced to participate in School-to-Career through the application of three primary strategies:

Build on What Exists

Many workplace partners already have a commitment to education, especially through employee or member volunteer programs and donations. Local organizations (like yours) and schools are coordinating proven, successful School-to-Career activities. Building on what already exists inside their organizations and in the community provides maximum impact without re-inventing the wheel.

Solve a Business Need

Businesses and labor can meet short-term needs by bringing enthusiastic, skilled young people into the workplace. Student interns can help complete meaningful projects and can be a strategic investment in future, loyal employees. Workplace partners also meet marketing objectives and build their customer base or union membership through positive exposure and publicity.

Invest in Your Community

Strong communities mean vibrant local economies. Helping build better schools and future leaders benefits everyone. School-to-Career provides an easy, coordinated vehicle to significantly impact local schools and students and allows workplace partners to demonstrate a leadership role in the communities where they live and work.

Organize Your Product or Service

Part of getting ready is making sure that your materials and systems for delivering quality services to your workplace partners are in order. Define and promote a sequenced range of participation options that make it easy to begin and grow your activities based on success. You should have a set of services at your fingertips that respond to identified partner needs, and your materials should reflect this range of options and services, while being professional, clear and in the language of your target audience.

On the school side, become aware of the needs and readiness of teachers and students. This means you need to play an active role in helping to build the systems and structures in the schools that promote School-to-Career and support work-based learning.

PROFILE –

Preparing Students for Opportunities

Workforce Silicon Valley, the local School-to-Career partnership in Santa Clara County, prepares students for work-based learning opportunities through Student Leadership Institutes. In partnership with a leading job fair production company, Brass Ring, Workforce Silicon Valley brings hundreds of students each year to the largest High Tech recruitment fair in their area. At the fair, students participate in seminars on work readiness skills, teamwork, resume writing and dressing for success. The students are also invited to visit the recruitment fair floor to interact with employers and applicants, and in some cases observe on-site interviews with prospective applicants. Students leave the Leadership Institute at the fair with a new appreciation for the skills and personal qualities they will need to succeed in the workplace.

Identify Your Resources for Engagement

The good news is you are not in this alone. There are a number of existing structures and individuals that are ready to help you in the engagement process.

Begin by meeting with employer and labor members of your local partnership, advisory boards and committees as well as key members of local chambers of commerce and industry associations who already have a stake in the local School-to-Career system. Research and meet with employer and labor champions who have had success with School-to-Career to solicit their help in building an engagement strategy and identifying new partners.

Define your internal resources to support engagement activities. How many staff are on your team? Are there others at the schools or in programs that share your responsibility of engaging workplace partners? How can you best organize and coordinate your outreach activities? You should also catalog and assess your current materials, and determine your budget for marketing to employers and labor.

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Finally, get to know the landscape in your community. There are many programs and people focused on connecting employers and labor to school and community-based programs for a variety of activities, including job placements, mentoring, equipment and other donations, and volunteer opportunities. There are also employer and labor sponsored efforts, including registered apprenticeship programs and college internship programs. Get to know these programs and the people who work in them. Many have years of experience working with a defined set of workplace partners, and have tested strategies, tools and support systems in place. These potential partners are a resource to you, not your competition.

PROFILE – *An Industry Sector Approach*

Business Liaisons from the Marin County School-to-Career Partnership specialize in one or two specific industry sectors (for example, Information Technology, Healthcare or Financial Services). Through this approach, the Liaisons have become experts in particular industries and better manage the pool of prospective partners. Employers find that because the Business Liaisons are focused on the unique needs of their business and speak their language, they are more positive about participating in School-to-Career.

PROFILE – *Targeted Campaigns and Events*

The Bay Area School-to-Career Action Network (BaySCAN) builds employer participation in its 15 member School-to-Career partnerships through industry-specific regional events called FutureCareers Expos. In the spring of 2001, BaySCAN hosted the first expo for Financial Services. Over 250 students and teachers from numerous counties convened at Pacific Bell Park to learn from industry-led workshops, participate in a recruitment and college fair for internships and employment opportunities, and make valuable contacts for the future.

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STEP 2 – Make a Plan and Stick to It!

A clear plan for engaging workplace partners, based on targeted and proven marketing and selling strategies, makes all the difference in bringing new partners on board. Your goal is to have a defined process to promote School-to-Career that makes sense to your potential workplace partners.

Your plan should:

- Provide clear and simple information that is free from jargon.
- Focus on the value and benefits of participation.
- Make it easy to begin, then actively support ongoing participation.
- Show how School-to-Career meets identified workplace needs and provides a vehicle for making meaningful impact on young people and the community.

Define Your Customer Base and Qualify the Market

The first step in developing a plan for engagement is to define the industries and types of potential partners you are targeting and which will likely be receptive to your message. Begin to build partner involvement by focusing on partners in high-growth areas, and those that have prior involvement in business-education partnerships or other community-based activities.

Look for workplace partners that have:

- A record of hiring young people.
- Skill shortages among entry-level workers.
- Cooperative labor-management relations.
- A commitment to employee training and diversity.
- A need that may be filled by local School-to-Career initiatives.
- Visible involvement in community and educational issues.

Create and Follow a Marketing Plan

Having a focused marketing plan will help guide your decisions for outreach to workplace partners. A written plan will keep you from being driven by short-term tasks and help you focus on a strategy that builds from one activity to the next.[1]

There are four main areas of marketing School-to-Career to include in your plan as a set of equally balanced activities; general awareness, targeted marketing, direct recruiting and student/school recruiting.

These four basic marketing categories act as a funnel of opportunities for students, schools and satisfied workplace partners. Your job as an Engagement Specialist is to coordinate and time each activity to create a balance between workplace partner demand and students and schools that are ready to participate.

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[1] *Sample marketing plans and templates for creating your own plan can be found at www.nww.org.*

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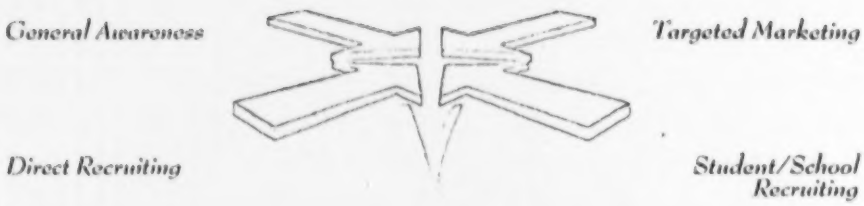

ENGAGED WORKPLACE PARTNERS

Of course, requests for work-based learning opportunities sometimes come before you have created demand among a set of willing partners, and will drive your marketing focus. For example, a teacher at a local school may have a group of twenty students interested in job shadowing professionals in healthcare. If you have done your homework and have a list of targeted companies in that sector, you will be able to focus your efforts and fill the request while meeting a critical need at the school.

There are other times when Engagements Specialists generate significant demand from workplace partners without having the necessary supply of willing and ready students to fill them. It is your responsibility to know when and how many students will be ready for work-based learning before you generate demand in the workplace. The key is to balance and support supply and demand so that you meet the needs and expectations of both the schools and workplace partners.

Marketing Plan

A successful Marketing Plan guides your efforts on three levels; the broad concept, which defines your goals, expectations, target audience, and key messages; your specific objectives and the strategies you plan to use to meet those objectives; and finally a detailed calendar of marketing and sales activities to keep your effort on track. Consider the following outline for your plan:

- Statement of General Purpose – who you are, broad goals and objectives.
- Target Audiences – who you are trying to engage.
- Marketing Sales Goals and Objectives – quantifiable primary and secondary outcomes.
- Key Messages – value and benefit statements in clear and simple language.
- Resources – staff, services, dollars and other resources targeted to the engagement effort.
- Marketing and Sales Strategies – approaches you plan to use.
- Detailed Activities Calendar – to guide daily, weekly and monthly activities.

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Focus Your Efforts and Connect to Others

Remember, you are not alone in your efforts to engage workplace partners. Connect with other organizations and individuals doing this work to leverage your time and resources. Network regularly with staff from existing organizations that seek to create work-based learning opportunities for youth including community organizations, other school-based placement programs or local summer jobs programs. Use the expertise and contact lists of employer and labor partners to help with outreach, especially through industry associations, labor organizations and chambers of commerce. Finally, use your existing employer, labor and community champions to help shape and deliver your message.

Build a Simple and Efficient Delivery System

Your marketing strategies will create demand, both from workplace partners and from students and teachers. Having a well-defined and simple system for meeting this demand will ensure your success. This includes knowing the structures in the schools and community that support School-to-Career participation, such as academies, pathways, Tech-Prep, Regional Occupational Programs, Apprenticeship and other programs. You also have established campaigns such as National Groundhog Job Shadow Day and California Intern Summer that can help with coordination and leverage statewide and national media efforts. Finally, a good database system, particularly one that is internet-based, helps you manage supply and demand and deliver on your promises.

PROFILE – *Building a School-to-Career and Workforce Development System*

In order to streamline the creation and delivery of work-based learning and employment opportunities for local youth, the San Diego Workforce Partnership aligned the efforts of School-to-Career, local one-stops, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce's Learn and Earn internship program, ROP and the Youth Opportunity Program. Through the San Diego Workforce Partnership, all of these organizations are able to successfully reach out to employers and labor organizations in a coordinated way, sharing resources and contacts. This coordination also makes it easier for students to connect to opportunities and creates a seamless School-to-Career and workforce development system in San Diego County.

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Step 3 – Market and Sell Your Service

Once you have a focused plan for engagement, it's time to implement your strategies. Focus on finding long-term partners not simply making one-time placements, where you can grow employer and labor participation over time and build lasting relationships.

PROFILE – *Employer-to-Employer Approach*

LEED Sacramento, the local School-to-Career partnership, uses an employer-to-employer approach to solicit new members into their High Tech Consortium. Key employer partners are equipped with a script, fact sheet and a list of benefits and participation options and asked to make calls to three additional employers from a targeted list. Through the help of these employer champions, LEED has significantly increased their pool of participating High Tech businesses.

Consider using the following strategies that work:

- Network in many circles and connect with industry associations and chambers of commerce both formally and informally at events and functions.
- Use employer-to-employer approaches, asking committed workplace partners to develop leads on your behalf.
- Leverage existing campaigns and initiatives that build awareness for School-to-Career, including National Groundhog Job Shadow Day, California Intern Summer and media partnerships in your local market.
- Spend time in the industry or business you seek to target. Attend meetings and events or consider personal job shadows.
- Work your personal network assertively, asking family, friends and colleagues for contacts.
- Capitalize on opportunities quickly and efficiently.
- Qualify leads to ensure there is value for both the partner and the school.
- Keep an organized database that can be accessed by others on your team so that everyone understands the history of each client.
- Use the tools provided through www.nww.org and www.stc-clearinghouse.com, such as the employer and labor Next Steps Worksheets, marketing plan templates, sample materials and self-assessments to guide your conversations and planning with partners.

Making the Sale

Once you have completed your research and qualified likely workplace partners, it's time to make contact. During the call or visit, apply what you know about the industry and its operations. Ask informed, open-ended questions to identify needs you can potentially meet. Are there activities underway that you might build on? What are the critical needs of the partner that you might address? Might you leverage a commitment to a particular community effort? Your goal is to uncover the potential partner's motivation, emphasize the value and benefits of participation and describe how your services can facilitate their involvement.

Begin with a Focus on Customer Service

Successful contact depends on a focus on customer service and structuring each sales presentation to address the unique needs and circumstances of each prospective workplace partner. The foundation of long-term relationships with workplace partners is to provide the kind of service they expect and get from others.

Consider the following keys for becoming "customer focused" in the engagement process:

- Treat partners as highly valued customers.
- Learn all you can about the potential workplace partner prior to the first visit.
- Respond effectively to the needs and concerns of the partners.
- Utilize modern communication systems such as voicemail, pagers and e-mail, adhering to business standards of communication (same day response, voice mail message detailing how quickly you can respond).
- Use industry terminology and language, avoiding educational jargon.
- Solve problems and create solutions. Never give excuses.
- Under-promise and over-deliver, making promises you can keep and exceed!
- Project a "can-do" attitude at all times.

Critical Success Factor

Use proven messages that emphasize value when articulating the benefits of School-to-Career to potential workplace partners. Here are a few examples of messages that work:

- *Reduces training and recruitment costs by directly connecting to the future workforce.*
- *Increases productivity – quality work by students in the workplace contributes to the bottom line.*
- *Builds employee morale and leadership skills through mentoring and coaching students.*
- *Creates vibrant schools and communities leading to prosperous local economies.*
- *Generates positive exposure from a high profile commitment to students and the community.*

Effectively Structure Your Sales Presentation

The presentation you make during the face-to-face meeting should encourage questions and comments. Also, be mindful of time and mention this in the begining. If you've been clear, they will know exactly what you want and how to respond to your opportunity!

Use the following general rules when customizing your presentation to a specific workplace partner:

- **Understand employer and labor motivation** - When asked why they participate in partnerships with schools, workplace partners generally point to workforce development and community relations. Efforts to recruit workplace partners should address both of these issues and be framed in terms of benefits to the partner.
- **Recognize that all workplace partners are not alike** - Employers and labor unions are not homogenous groups; a variety of factors affect their decisions, including their size, management structure, work environment, business climate and mission. Do your homework before contacting workplace partners; learn as much as you can about their business and industry.
- **Expect to answer important & hard questions** - Workplace partners want clear, concise explanations. They will want to know about costs and benefits, program administration, design, purpose and the roles and responsibilities of each party. The more you anticipate questions on these issues, the more likely your recruitment efforts are to succeed.
- **Understand why some workplace partners are more comfortable with work-based learning than others** - Knowing in advance the most common reasons workplace partners give for resisting participation can help you anticipate their concerns and make a stronger appeal. Most commonly, employers share concerns about cost, down-time for their employees and the general issues that surface as a result of having youth in the workplace. The good news is that most of these objections are easy to overcome.[2]

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[2] *Refer to the companion guide, Can-Do Approaches to Work-based Learning for approaches you can use to address these concerns. Use an employer or labor Next Steps Worksheet as your guide during a sales meeting. This helpful tool can make it easy to ask good questions and help partners plan their participation.*

Critical Success Factor

Bring successful students and/or workplace supervisors with you to meetings and presentations to speak about their first-hand experiences with School-to-Career. These advocates can be your best spokespeople about how easy it is to participate and the impacts a workplace partner can have on students and their organization through School-to-Career. If you plan to use this approach, let your prospective partner know ahead of time who will be attending and why they will be there.

Remember that offering work-based learning is just one of many participation options for workplace partners in the local School-to-Career system. Make sure you value and support a full range of participation options. This will allow you to nurture and grow your relationships over time.

At the end of a successful recruitment meeting, you will have established a good relationship with the contact through active and careful listening and shared understanding. Complete the meeting with clear agreement on next steps and with whom and when you should make contact for follow-up. Leave behind your professional packet of information for reference.

Step 4 – Deliver Flawless Follow-Up

Remember that the success of your marketing and sales efforts hinges on one critical element — flawless follow-up. It is important to include follow-up in every aspect of your engagement process. This begins with the simple, timely thank-you note. Beyond that, creating "quality" customer service depends on paying attention to the following lessons gathered from successful engagement specialists around the state.

"You have to recruit volunteers who are consistent and reliable. In order to boost participation, volunteers need support and recognition from both management and school partners."
Mary Pappas

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE, FRESNO

Become the main resource for information and problem solving — employers and labor partners want a single person to depend on to address issues and meet their needs. Your goal is to be that person. That means being the primary information source for School-to-Career and partnering with education and community programs in general. If you cannot solve a problem or meet a need directly, your job is to refer the partner to someone who can.

Once a partner gets connected, continue to support their participation. Follow up on regular basis to make sure that their needs and expectations are being met. Make yourself available to help resolve any issues or problems that may arise. Regular and ongoing communication will help you nurture and expand activities with each partner over time.

Flawless follow-up relies on continuous improvement and solid communication among all partners. Conduct regular satisfaction surveys and share the results with your partners. Conduct regular performance assessments to guide decisions and make improvements. Examine the effectiveness of your marketing strategies and adjust them as needed — you have limited time and resources — focus on the activities that work for you. [3]

PROFILE – *Meeting Local Business Needs*

Engagement Specialists from School-to-Career partnerships in the North Coast of California listened to local business owners describe the basic skills students need for entry-level employment, such as being on time, communicating well and having a good attitude. In response, the partnerships launched a community and school campaign promoting the "Big 5" work readiness skills students need to become employed in the local economy. By meeting the needs of local businesses, the partnerships have increased employer participation in School-to-Career and opened updoors for students to gain internships and employment.

[3] *Sample satisfaction surveys and assessment for flawless follow-up can be found at www.nww.org. and www.stc-clearinghouse.com*

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Additional Resources

Now that you have a good idea of how to begin the engagement process, here are a number of additional resources to help you answer questions and gain access to many more proven tools and strategies.

www.nww.org

The website for New Ways to Work that serves as a portal for additional employer and labor engagement information, such as:

- A full set of engagement tools, marketing plans and worksheets to support your work.
- Quick Guides for employers, organized labor and associations.
- Expanded Guidebooks for Engaging Workplace Partners and Quality Work-based Learning.
- Next Steps Worksheets for employers, labor and associations to take further action.
- Proven strategies and effective practices from throughout the state and country.
- Can Do Approaches for Work-based Learning, a guide to successful approaches that address the laws and regulations pertaining to youth in the workplace.
- Specific tips for small businesses and industry specific examples.
- Links to additional resources and School-to-Career organizations.

www.stc-clearinghouse.com

A one-stop website for helpful tools and materials for School-to-Career and other education improvement initiatives. At the School-to-Career clearinghouse you can search for best-practice tools and materials from across the state. This site also houses this Quick Guide for Engagement Specialists and many other helpful tools, all available for downloading in PDF format.

www.worksite21.org

An employer-focused site, developed by the Oregon Business Council, with interactive tools for participation in School-to-Career called "The Bigger Picture."

www.stcconnect.com

An easy way to get connected to statewide campaigns such as National Groundhog Job Shadowing and California Intern Summer.

www.calmis.ca.gov

The Employment Development Department (EDD) website for labor market information. In particular, refer to the section called the California Cooperative Occupational Information System.

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